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ABSTRACT

Although social science has contributed much to the student of schools, the perspectives of earlier thinkers about school effectiveness can fill some of our present need, too, by emphasizing the social values most important and then applying them as educational standards. Former generations viewed good schools normatively rather than empirically (that is, rather than using test scores as evidence of outcomes). Educators should not abandon normative principles simply because of the existence of standarized test scores. Instead of giving up on applying contemporary school effectiveness research, those interested in improving educational quality should be aware of the limitations of the research--not applying it too broadly or simplistically. Effective schools should be defined as educational settings for teachers as well as students, stimulating teachers to learn as they teach. The Schenley High School Teacher Center in Pittsburgh may be a step in that direction: a school that emphasizes teacher education much as a teaching hospital emphasizes medical education. (JW)

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EDUCATION BRIEF

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A PERSPECTIVE ON EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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In 1963 I was interviewed for my first job at Michigan State University by Wilbur Brookover, the chairman of what was to be my department. Brookover had this mad idea that there was something about school climate and school self-concept that was an important determinant of what made school a good place. Of course all of us thought that that was all nonsense; it was how carefully and how behaviorally your objectives were defined that made the difference. But the madness of the sixties passed and Brookover's wisdom was later recognized.

What I'd like to do today is to provide some perspective on the discussion of effective schools. This perspective will require talking a bit about the past because one of the questions we might raise is, "What were we all doing before we were talking about effective schools?" Wasn't anybody concerned with school improvement, and if so, what were they doing? What was guiding our efforts before we had the research data we now have?

I find that my doctoral students tend to be incredibly ahistorical. For them it's an embarrassment to cite a reference that's more than four years old, and I practically have to bludgeon them into taking a course in the history of education. So I hope you'll bear with me if I begin with some discussion of past attempts to improve schooling. It may put some perspective on what we're doing now and since there's a cyclical quality to educational trends, it may also give us some idea of what the future may bring.

Early Images of Effective Schooling

Let me go back to the beginning of this century. On what grounds did people talk about what a good education was, what a good teacher was, what a good school was in 1900 or 1905? They had all kinds of very precise discussions about who were better or poorer teachers, which were better or poorer schools. But by today's standards these discussions were very unscientific. They didn't have test scores to use at the time. All they had were values. All they had were philosophies of education. All they had were commitments and ideologies and well-debated views of the good life and what knowledge was most worth. They had a lot that we in our slavish acceptance of "scientific criteria of outcomes" may have

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lost as part of the price of our progress. And one of the messages I'll try to leave you with is that we need not forego the progress we've made through the applications of social science, but perhaps if we return to some concern for those values and perspectives we'll be further ahead.

Let me tell you what I mean. The most important influence on the thinking about teaching that occurred in those days was the work of John Dewey. I sometimes get very depressed about John Dewey. Like another great thinker of his age, Sigmund Freud, he is far more often quoted than read these days. It is possible for someone to get a Ph.D. in education without ever having read a page of Dewey. But there was a Dewey, and he did have quite an impact. The impact he had was in communicating to several generations of educators an image of the good classroom and the good school. The image was based on his concept of a good society, a democratic society in which people made decisions about their respective well-being through deliberation, through discussion, through the exercise of reason and knowledge.

And if this was the way a good society looked, then it ought to be mirrored at every level of society--so that a government should work that way, a school should work that way, and a classroom should work that way. That was his first point. His second point was that if children were to grow up to be adults who had to take their place in that kind of society they had to have practice. Teachers need practice; we call it practice teaching. Physicians need practice; we call it rotating internships and residencies. Airline pilots need practice; they use simulators before they go out into the real thing. Children need practice, and the practice environment for citizenry is called a classroom according to Dewey. And if you knew what a good society looked like, you could go into a classroom and ask, "Is this the kind of place that's giving kids that opportunity?"

But Dewey was a very complicated man. He didn't stop there. He also had an idea that knowledge was something that people invented. They produced it; they did it actively. It was called experimenting, devising instruments to make the world reveal secrets it wasn't going to reveal by itself. It meant asking and inquiring. You didn't learn about the world from sitting back until it told you something when it felt like it. Given this idea of knowledge, someone could go into a classroom and watch the way knowledge was dealt with in that classroom, and he could say, "Yes, that is an approximation of the way in which knowledge is created and transmitted," or "No, that is not."

What I'm coming to here is the notion that there were images of good education, of good teaching and good learning, of good school settings, and they were not naive or ideological. They came from a very careful and thoughtful appraisal. And it wasn't only Dewey; there were many others as well who spoke not only of what it meant to gain knowledge and competence so that you could be a productive member of a democratic society but also of how to apply those principles to the study of schools.

Ralph Tyler and his group at Ohio State and then later at the University of Chicago completed the most remarkable and extensive study of schools ever done--the Eight Year Study. It was a remarkable study of progressive schools and their consequences. The study was based on a normative concept of good schooling.

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Let me now distinguish between a normative view of a good school and what I'll call an empirical view. An empirical view defines a good school by its outcomes--a change in test scores, or employment rate, decreases in delinquency rates, improved attendance rates or some combination of these. You define what a good school is on the basis of measures of these empirically derived outcomes. A normative view of a good school is the view that I've been describing in the last few minutes. This view is based on an analysis of what you believe is of greatest value and is determined by the comparison between those standards and what you observed.

Let me give you a specific example of this normative approach. We're used to looking at effective teaching studies by asking the question "Which of these approaches obtains the highest gains in reading performance?" But a very influential study was done a few years ago by Dolores Durkin at the University of Illinois Center for the Study of Reading. She went to a number of classrooms and asked a somewhat different question: "Can I find any instances in which reading comprehension is taught, and if so under what conditions?" She didn't go out looking for outcomes; she had a normative model, a model of what reading comprehensive instruction looked like. She distinguished between having the child read silently and fill out a work sheet and giving the child some instruction about how to comprehend, followed by strategies for making sense out of reading passages. She wasn't asking, "How do students do on test scores?"; she was saying, "Can I find examples of that kind of instruction, and if so under what conditions?" That's an example of an effectiveness study that uses a normative criterion. And as some of you may know, her results were very distressing. She found almost no instances of instruction in reading comprehension. When she asked teachers if they taught comprehension, the answer was always yes. But when she asked how, it was almost always, "they read and then I give them comprehension exercises to fill out and I mark them and I give them back."

During the late fifties and early sixties, the kind of research that was done on effectiveness in general was normative. In these studies the outcomes were based on democratic values, not empirical indicators of achievement. And it is out of this atmosphere that what we now identify as the effective schools movement then developed. It was a very important movement--and it still is. The late sixties was the era of the Coleman Report--when we were told that schools didn't make much of a difference, that there are other more powerful influences in the society. At the same time this was the era of the student uprisings, the 1968 Democratic Convention and Kent State. People began to get very skittish about the absence of discipline, the absence of direction, the absence of control in our schools.

And somehow out of this matrix developed a very fascinating body of research. It's the research which to this day has continued as the mainstream of effective teaching and effective schools research. It is an empirical stream that says we can identify the patterns of teaching in classrooms and the forms of organization and management in schools that predictably result in increased performance on achievement tests for young people. Schools do make a difference, and, in fact, the way they make a difference is by foregoing a lot of this Deweyan nonsense and putting the control back in the hands of the teachers. An extraordinarily well-crafted tradition of research on direct instruction and time-on-task changed the rules by saying the normative view is inadequate. We can't simply go in and apply these general images of the good school. We've got to anchor these judgments in something we can depend on, and let's try achievement test scores. At the same time, researchers acknowledged that test scores don't measure everything that's worthwhile about a school. They are an indicator of an important but narrow range of what schools are about. They have continually warned us not to confuse effectiveness as

measured by that standard with effectiveness in general. Don't confuse the score for everything else the school is responsible for accomplishing.

Three Nightmares about Education

About a year ago I was asked to comment on an emerging conflict between policymakers who wanted to fulfill their obligations to improve the quality of schooling for all children by writing regulations that would ensure all kids an equal opportunity and the teaching profession that said, "We know what we're doing. Don't try to mandate everything we do." Let me share with you the observations I made at that time. By the way, they appear in a book that Gary Sykes and I have edited called The Handbook of Teaching and Policy.

I began by saying that what unfortunately motivates people to choose courses of action is rarely the ideals they pursue; more often it's the nightmares they're trying to avoid. We often choose what we want to do to avoid what frightens us rather than out of the motivation to accomplish what we value most. The participants in the struggles over teaching and public policy all have their nightmares. Many of the policymakers have a vision of teachers who do not teach--or teach only what they please to those who please them, who prefer a transient fad to the tougher less rewarding regimen of achieving tangible results in the basic skills, who close their schoolhouse doors and hide their incompetence behind union-sheltered resistance to accountability and merit pay, whose low expectations of the intellectual prowess of poor children lead them to neglect their pedagogical duties toward the very groups who need instruction most desperately, or whose limited knowledge of the sciences, mathematics, and language arts results in their misteaching the most able. Many policymakers see an unwilling or inept teacher resisting the implementation of policies based on research that are designed to help children and to benefit the greater society. That's the policymaker's nightmare.

Teachers have their own nightmare, that of a besieged and beleagured group of dedicated professionals, inadequately appreciated or compensated, attempting to instruct reasonably and flexibly under impossible conditions. They are subject to countless mandates and directives emanating from faceless bureaucrats pursuing patently political agendas. Not only do these policies frequently dictate absurd practices, but they also typically conflict with the policies transmitted from other agencies, from the courts, or from other levels of government. Each new policy further erodes the teacher's control over the classroom for which he is responsible. Pupils are yanked willy-nilly out of the room for special instruction, disrupting the continuity of their classroom experience and upsetting the normal flow of classroom life for everyone else. A larger number of children--bussed children and handicapped children--and inexperienced aides must be accommodated in the classroom while at the same time the teacher must take on an extra hour a day of reading, a new writing initiative, more rigorous mathematics and science, sex education, bi-cultural education, and in her spare time, carefully maintain the detailed individual records needed to create the bureaucrat's audit trail. That's the teacher's nightmare.

So that teachers and bureaucrats weren't the only ones who were losing sleep at night, I thought it was important to add to those two nightmares a third nightmare--the researcher's nightmare. Researchers have their own version of the nightmare. In it they see both policymakers and practitioners pursuing their respective chores mindlessly without benefit of the carefully collected, sifted, analyzed, and interpreted bodies of knowledge that constitute the stuff of educational scholarship. This body of work includes both the most esoteric products of basic social science research and the concrete results of large scale surveys and experiments as well as the rich descriptive portraits of educational ethnographers. The scholar's nightmare is of an educational system at all levels uninformed by the wisdom of research, unguided by the lessons of scholarship.

I would add one additional nightmare, one that I think we see all too often. That's the nightmare that my teacher Joe Schwab referred to thirty years ago in an article he dubbed "On the Corruption of Education by Psychology." It is the nightmare that occurs when a researcher, who can only do research by limiting a problem, by controlling variables, by focusing in on a rather limited set of events so that they can be seen clearly and understood, finds those results applied broadly and generalized well beyond the confines of the circumstances in which they were originally investigated. So on the one hand, educational researchers say please don't overgeneralize our work, but on the other hand, please don't ignore us. We've had a lot of experience being ignored, and we aren't saying to stop applying our work. What we really mean is look at it carefully, understand it in its own terms, recognize its implications and its limitations, and apply it judiciously.

Making Your School More Effective

What I'd like to do in the last part of this talk is not to ask you to stop paying attention to the research on effective teaching and effective schools. No, I want you to pay more attention to it than you may have before. I want you to take it seriously and the way to take it seriously is to understand it for what it can and cannot do with respect to the guidance of educational policy and practice. Pay heed to people like Good and Brophy when they say don't confuse effective schools with good schools--if by effective you mean schools in which test scores have gone up. Your job is not over when the test scores have gone up; it has just begun. It may very well be that since almost all the effective schools research has been done in schools where test scores were very, very low to begin with and the job was to get them up to the national median, that the conditions for making average schools excellent may be totally different from the conditions for making poor schools minimally effective. That's one of those limitations that's built into research. If you were doing medical research, you would not generalize from what's good for a common cold to what's good for cancer. You'd know that solutions are situation-specific. Well, that's true in the social sciences and education as well. So one of the important points I want to make is take the work seriously. Look at it with the kind of critical eye that the scholars who conduct the research use to look at each other's work and which real respect for that work would entail.

Second, don't abdicate your obligations as educators to apply normative principles. The existence of standardized achievement test scores does not relieve us of the obligation to have a normative image of what a good classroom, good teacher, and good school ought to look like--an image that goes well beyond what any test can measure. We know what lousy curriculum is like. We know what it's like when kids are sitting and not using their heads at all in classrooms. And if the tests aren't picking up those differences, so much the worse for the tests. We've got to use our collective, practical, professional wisdom even more now than ever before. Education is one of those fields where very often the practice is ahead of the research. Right here in the city of San Francisco there are teachers who are teaching at a level of excellence that exceeds what any of our research models can explain. The last thing in the world I want them to do is stop what they're doing so that they can abide by the principles of effective schooling. Now some of their work might get even better if they thought about these principles, but not if someone simply slaps a mandate on them.

There's a new book called The Good High School by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, a good source of data on effective schools. It's an in-depth look at six American high schools: two of them are private elite schools in the East; two are suburban high schools; and two are inner-city schools. The author spent a good deal of time in each of those schools, and she has written a portrait of each. One of the things

that just springs out at you is how differently effectiveness is defined at the different schools because they're starting in different places and dealing with different problems. What is appropriate at one isn't appropriate at another. And they aren't just social class differences; they are differences in what is problematic about teaching and schooling in these different settings. But there's another point that Sara Lightfoot makes. She writes about six utterly different institutions and she asks herself, "Is there anything I can find in common about these institutions?" At the end of the book Sara has what she calls her group portrait where she asks what do these places have in common? One of her observations is this:

"Just as the principals in these portraits are seen as more complex and less dominant than their caricatures so too are teachers recognized as bolder and more forceful than their stereotypes would imply. In all six schools I was struck by the centrality and dominance of teachers and by the careful attention given to their needs. To varying degrees the teachers in these schools are recognized as critical educational authorities--the ones who will guide the learning, growth and development of students most closely. Their intimacy with students and the immediacy of their involvement with the substance of schooling puts them in a privileged and special position. In addition, school leaders who are more distant from the daily interactions must depend upon teachers as major interpreters of student behavior and values. They are positioned at the core of education."

A Radical Criterion for Effective Schools

That leads to my last point. I would like to suggest another image for you to carry around in your heads of what an effective school is like--an image that goes beyond the empirical view of a school that produces gains in test scores and goes beyond the Deweyan view of schools as places where children can learn to inquire actively, create knowledge, and participate in a democratic society. I'd like to suggest a view of an effective school that you will treat as outrageous. I think we ought to define effective schools as those that are educative settings for teachers. To put it another way, I will define as ineffective any school that is so organized that the teachers on that faculty cannot be active learners with as much serious support for that role as the students get. Now I know that's outrageous. I know it's irresponsible. I know that school is a place for kids to learn in, not for teachers to learn in. But I want you to suspend your good judgment for a moment and think about it. We know you can't be smart about everything you need to be smart about the day you enter the classroom for the first time. We also know that there aren't a lot of opportunities to get smarter the way our careers are currently organized. So my question is: If the quality of education for kids ultimately depends on how smart teachers are about their teaching and about their subjects, what better place for them to learn new things than in the school itself?

I ask you to think about two kinds of institutions. First, think for a moment about hospitals, especially our very best hospitals, our teaching hospitals. If you've ever been a patient in a teaching hospital, you have seen doctors come by on

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rounds. The professor, residents, interns, and medical students gather around the patient's bed, treating the patient as teaching material. This is not always a pleasant experience for the patient, but that is a topic for another day. They're doing this because they view one of the major functions of that hospital is to serve an educative purpose for its staff. The patient is an opportunity for instruction. They have a weekly clinical pathological conference in which a different case is presented for the entire staff of the hospital. During this time the staff isn't taking care of patients; they're meeting together on the job because they have an obligation as an institution to continue the professional development of the members of the institution.

You can justify creating institutions that have as a major purpose the continuing educative value they have for their staff. For example, in the city of Pittsburgh the school board is allocating about a million and a half dollars a year for an institution called the Schenley High School Teacher Center. It is a public high school that was scheduled to be closed. But they decided to keep it open, and they staffed it with fifty teachers drawn from the other eight high schools in the city--teachers who were viewed as very competent by their peers and were interested in being models for other teachers. There are twelve hundred students at the school, and the regular teaching load is three or four classes a day. Over a four year period, every high school teacher in Pittsburgh will rotate through the Schenley School for a period of eight weeks to watch other teachers, to have seminars, to study, to learn, to discuss, to think, to reflect, and then to go back to their home school and apply what they have learned. As each cadre of 50 teachers moves into Schenley from all over the city they are in turn replaced by a group called the replacement teachers, which is the first cadre to have gone through Schenley.

Now the Schenley experiment could possibly fall short because they're pioneering at so many things at once. But it's exciting. It's something that we've got to watch because here is a school system that says we take responsibility for making our school district an educative setting for teachers. My dream is that after four or five or six years Schenley High School will no longer be the one school in the district where you can go and be educated. But as more and more teachers filter through and go back, they will slowly begin to bring more and more of Schenley back to the remaining Pittsburgh high schools.

It won't happen overnight. Changing the conditions of teaching is a little bit like trying to change the quality of a large lake. It took many years to get it polluted and you're not going to be able to drop a tablet into it and change it overnight--which is why our policymakers, our union leaders, our school administrators have got to have vision. They can't be expecting that quick payoff and the change in test scores tomorrow. Schenley represents what I mean when I say schools and school districts to be called effective must, in addition to what they can do for students, demonstrate that they are educative settings for teachers. I've suggested to some policymakers in Sacramento that whenever anybody passes new legislation about schools, they should attach what I call a Pedogogical Impact Statement. It's like an environmental impact statement except it asks the question what impact is this going to have on the work of the teacher in the classroom: how much more paper work, how many more students of which kinds with what sorts of trade offs? A Pedogogical Impact Statement will ensure that as you implement innovations, you do them in a way that makes schools educative settings for teachers. And once they are, I will guarantee that they will have become educative for the pupils and communities they serve as well.